Bhamdoun: Historical Portrait of a Lebanese Mountain Village

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*Kamal Salibi**

From Beirut, one sees the sun rise over the sheer escarpment of Jabal Sannin in the summer, and the rounded peaks of Jabal al-Kanisah in the winter. From the slopes of Sannin, the Christian country, starting with the regions of the northern Matn and Kisrawan, runs northward through the highlands of Jubayl and Batrun to end in the hinterland of Tripoli. From the slopes of al-Kanisah, the Druze country of the southern Lebanon, starting with the regions of the southern Matn and the Gharb, runs southward through the highlands of the Shuf, to end in the hinterland of Sidon. Between the Matn on the Gharb, which together form the Kanisah slopes, the dividing line is the highway running from Beirut inland, in the direction of the Bekaa valley and Damascus.

The Druze region of the Gharb, on which we must now focus, consists of four parallel mountain ridges. Of these, the lowest is that of the Gharb proper, which directly overlooks Beirut. Next comes the ridge of the 'lower' Jurd, rising to a mean altitude of about 1100 metres, and followed by the two ridges of the 'higher' Jurd. Originally, the whole of the Gharb used to be treated as one administrative unit. But after the Ottoman conquest of Syria in 1516, the Jurd ridges were separated from the Gharb proper to form an administrative district on their own: one of the five *nahies* of the *sanjak* (sub-province) of Sidon-Beirut, the other four *nahies* of this *sanjak* being those of the Gharb proper, the Matn, the Shuf and Kisrawan. Originally, the *sanjak* of Sidon-Beirut formed part of the *eyalet* (province) of Damascus. In 1660, however, this *sanjak*, along with the adjacent Galilean *sanjak* of Safad, came to form a separate *eyalet*—the

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eyalet of Sidon—which was administered from Sidon until 1775; from Acre until 1832; and thereafter from Beirut.

Among the inhabitants of Ottoman Syria, the Druzes of the mountains of Sidon-Beirut were those most given to insubordination. Hardly a decade of the sixteenth century passed without some major expedition being sent to reduce them. In the course of these expeditions, whole villages were laid waste, leaving the country badly depopulated. This opened the way for the first Christians from the poor and rugged reaches of the northern Lebanon to move southward and settle in the more arable and hospitable Druze lands. This Christian immigration to the Druze country appears to have started in the 1540s, or perhaps a little earlier. The Ottoman sultan at the time was Suleiman the Magnificent, and his contemporaries in Europe were Henry VIII of England, Francis I of France, Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire and Spain, and Martin Luther.

More Christians were to converge on the Druze country in due course, as the Ottomans, for lack of better alternatives, began to entrust the local government on the basis of *iltizam* (fiscal concession) to Druze emirs of the house of Ma`n; then, after 1697, to emirs of the Sunni Muslim, and later Maronite Christian, house of Shihab. In their eagerness to develop the agriculture of the depopulated Druze country, so as to derive more profit from its *iltizam*, the Ma`n emirs, and the Shihabs after them, did everything possible to encourage Christian immigration to it. The great Druze sheikhs, whose vast agricultural estates had long lain mostly fallow for lack of Druze hands to work them, also encouraged this immigration, in some instances by making gifts of land to Maronite and other Christian monastic orders.

In 1711, the Shihab emirs began to entrust each *nahie* of the Sidon-Beirut mountains as a *muqata'ah* (tax farm), to some local sheikhly family: Maronite sheikhs in Kisrawan; Druze sheikhs in the other parts. The Jurd, at the time, became the *muqata'ah* of the Abdel-Maliks, the Druze sheikhs of the village of Btater. Like other *muqata'ah* holders, the Abdel-Maliks continued to control their district and farm its taxes until the downfall of the Shihab emirate in 1841. After that, the family kept on controlling the Jurd on an unofficial basis until 1861. That was the year when the establishment of the *mutasarrifiyyah* (privileged governorate) of Mount Lebanon finally brought the traditional, quasi-feudal order in the country to an end.

As a Christian *day'ah* (village) of the Druze Jurd, Bhamdoun emerged into existence in the 1540s, with the arrival of the first Christian settlers to that region. Its location was to be on the western side of the 'lower' Jurd ridge, two kilometres off the Beirut-Damascus road, and within sight of Beirut and the Mediterranean horizon. On the inland side of the same Jurd ridge stood the Druze village of Shanay. Five kilometres away from Bhamdoun, to the south-west, lay the village of Btater, the historical seat of the Abdel-Malik sheikhs. Around Bhamdoun were its dependent *mazari'* (farming settlements, singular *mazra'ah*), all but two of them much older than Bhamdoun itself. A *day'ah* was distinguished from a *mazra'ah* in that it had a *suq* (marketplace).

The first Ottoman invasion of the Druze territory took place in 1523, about two decades before the Bhamdoun settlement was established. To celebrate the success of this invasion, camel loads of Druze heads were reportedly paraded through the streets of Damascus. In the Bhamdoun area, the invasion left most of the Druze *mazari'* in ruin, and without inhabitants. Those, apparently, came to be settled by Christian immigrants from different parts, at the same time as the Bhamdoun settlement was established. Among them were the *mazari'* of al-Mantara, Btalloun and Bhawwara, which were settled mainly by the Salibis: a shepherd clan which abandoned the valleys of the Anti-Lebanon in 1547 to move to the Druze country.

Before becoming a *day'ah* in the true sense, with a *suq* straddling the main road leading from Btater to the Damascus highway, Bhamdoun was no more than a stretch of terraced mountainside belonging to Btater. As the Christians began arriving to settle on that mountainside, they took over the cultivation of the land initially as sharecroppers, the ownership of the land remaining largely in Druze hands until the mid-nineteenth century, with the Abdel-Maliks as the principal landowners.

Though called a *day'ah* from the very start, the original Bhamdoun appears to have been more of a *mazra'ah* located a short distance downhill from what later became the true *day'ah*. This original Bhamdoun centred around a water spring still called *'Ayn al-Day'ah* (the village spring). The ruins of an old church in that location, called *Kanisat al-Mallul* (church of the oaks), were still standing in 1983, when Bhamdoun was destroyed at one stage of the Lebanese civil war. When there was sickness in the

family, Bhamdouni mothers used to vow to light candles at *Kanisat al-Mallul* if their sick recovered.

The patron saint of *Kanisat al-Mallul* was the *Sayyidah* (Lady, i.e. the Virgin Mary). When the new Bhamdoun was built, however, its two churches—the Maronite and the Greek Orthodox—were both given the name of *Mar Jiryis* (Saint Georges). The Druze neighbours of the Bhamdounis, it was said, would not agree to have them establish a new settlement along the main road from Btater to the Damascus highway, except on this condition. Much as they welcomed the Christian presence in their midst, the Druzes, priding themselves on being a virile warrior people, were averse to having Christian churches in their country called after female saints. They much preferred to have them called after male saints, the more masculine the better. And what saint was more quixotically masculine than Saint Georges?

Starting certainly from the sixteenth century, and probably from long before, the terraces of Bhamdoun were cultivated principally as vineyards. Their produce was marketed as fresh grapes, of which the village in my time boasted 39 varieties, or as raisins or molasses. The villagers also made wine and arak from their highly sweet *Miqsasi* grapes, but only for home consumption. The mulberry was also cultivated in Bhamdoun for the production of silk, the terraces unsuitable for vineyards or mulberry orchards being turned over to wheat. The land was generally dry-farmed, because its sparse and scattered water springs were insufficient for large-scale irrigation. The ravines at every bend of the Bhamdoun mountainside ran with water only in the dead season of winter, which made them agriculturally useless; in one ravine at the eastern extremity of the village, the winter torrent was strong enough to run a water mill, last used during the first world war.

Because of paucity of water, Bhamdoun had no fruit orchards, except for the fig trees lining the edges of the vineyards. It used to be said that suicide was unknown in the village, because Bhamdounis inclined to take their own lives were at a loss to find trees on which to hang themselves. Vegetables in the village could only be grown in season near the available water springs, and in quantities which did not suffice home demand. This made the Christians of Bhamdoun largely dependent for vegetable supplies on the Druzes of Shanay, where spring water was more abundant. Little pasturing was done in the village, as most of its land could be more

economically dry-farmed. But once the harvests were over, bedouins from the Kanisah heights would arrive to glean. Their arrival was welcome, because the goats they brought with them left their droppings in the fields to fertilise the land for the next crop.

I have seen one document relating to the early history of Bhamdoun, which records what was allegedly the first sale of Bhamdouni land by an original Druze landowner to a Christian newcomer: a Maronite of the Tabet clan. This land sale was concluded in 1545.

The Tabets came to Bhamdoun from the 'Aqura region, in the rugged heights of the Jubayl country. All the other Maronites who subsequently arrived to settle in the village attached themselves to the Tabets and assumed their name. This would have presumably helped them, as immigrants, to acquire more readily the social standing of old settlers. Consequently, the Tabets became a *'aylah* (clan) of the conglomerate type called *lafiyyah*, composed of *ajbab* (branches, singular *jubb*) originally unrelated to one another. The different branches of the Tabet clan, in fact, continued to carry their original *jubb* names alongside the adopted *'aylah* name of Tabet. It was known in Bhamdoun, moreover, that not all the *ajbab* of the Tabet clan came from the northern Lebanon. It was said, for instance, that the Sakhr Tabets were originally Damascene, their eponymous ancestor, Sakhr, having arrived in Mount Lebanon some time after 1840 to enter the service of some local dignitary.

Though in the minority as Maronites, the Tabets of Bhamdoun were recognised as the founders of the village. That was why they were accorded precedence at the *bayadir* (threshing floors) where the wheat, harvested in late June, was threshed and winnowed between July and September; also at the *ma'asir* (grape presses) where the mature *Miqsasi* grapes of the late summer and early autumn were turned into molasses. By my time, the village had ceased to grow its own wheat, and the abandoned *bayadir* had turned into playgrounds for children. But the Tabets continued to enjoy precedence at the principal *ma'sarah* of Bhamdoun until the early 1950s, when the village production of molasses ceased. This happened as the product, which was essentially a sweetener, finally yielded its place to the cheaper beet sugar, of which large quantities had come to be factory-produced in the Bekaa valley, where the beets were grown.

The native population of Bhamdoun, from start to end, was entirely Christian; and except for the Maronite Tabets, all the Bhamdounis were

originally Greek Orthodox. Among these, the Khairallahs formed the largest clan.

Like the Maronite Tabets, the Greek Orthodox Khairallahs represented a confederation of families—*ajbab*—each retaining its particular name: Waked, Bu-Dabbus, Zaydan, Zukr, al-Kahhal, Kan`an al-Khawaja, etc. Tradition maintained that Khairallah was the name of the common ancestor of these different *ajnab*; but the traditions regarding the exact relationship between them varied with the report. It was commonly believed, moreover, that some Khairallah families were relative newcomers to Bhamdoun, originally unrelated to the established line. One such Khairallah family, like the Sakhrs among the Tabets, was said to be of Damascene origin.

Among the *ajbab* of the Khairallah clan, antiquity was disputed between those of Waked and Bu-Dabbus, the latter, according to one genealogical version, being a *jubb* consisting of two branches: the Bu-Dabbus proper, and the Zaydan, of whom the Bu-Mu`izz were a sub-branch. While the Bu-Dabbus Khairallahs could not recall their place of origin, the Wakeds, whose presence in Bhamdoun was apparently the older one, claimed to have come originally from the village of al-Majdal, in the `Aqura region, at the same time as the Maronite Tabets, or shortly after. The senior line of the Wakeds, in which the eldest son was called Jiryis in one generation, and Mikhayil is the next, maintained a tradition of burying their dead in a vineyard called *Haql al-Shuwayyikh* (the field of the little sheikh), alleging that their ancestors had purchased that vineyard from the said 'little sheikh', a Btater Druze, in the mid-sixteenth century. As far as I know, they possessed no document to this effect.

The Greek Orthodox Abdel-Nurs, like the Khairallahs, constituted a clan comprising different *ajbab*, among them the Ilyans, the `Abdallah Shahins and the Sabras. They, also, had no clear idea as to how their different *ajbab* were related. Nor did they know for certain where they originally came from, or when they arrived to settle in Bhamdoun.

Two other Greek Orthodox clans of the village, the Ni`mahs and the Mattas, could better substantiate their claim to be clans whose different branches were related by *'asab*. The Ni`mahs, whose *ajbab* comprised the Ni`mahs proper, the Abi Khalids and the Bu-Radwans, claimed to have come originally from the district of *Qurnat al-Rum* (the corner of the Greek Orthodox) located on the lower slopes of the Jubayl country, and

hemmed in by Maronites from every side. The Mattas, for their part, maintained that their eponymous ancestor, *al-Khuri Matta* (Matta the priest) , was an immigrant to Bhamdoun from the Hawran region, in the Syrian interior. The Matta settlement in Bhamdoun, in that case, would have occurred in the latter half of the seventeenth century, when a large-scale Christian migration from the Hawran region to Transjordan, Palestine and the Lebanon was triggered by the weakening Ottoman control over the bedouin tribes of the Syrian desert.

As compared with the clans so far mentioned, most of the other inhabitants of Bhamdoun were relative newcomers. The Muja'ises, for instance, were said to have first arrived in Bhamdoun in the latter part of the nineteenth century to work as stone masons. Their village of origin was Shwayr, in the northern Matn, where the main Muja'is line survives to this day. The Salibis, Hashims and Habrs, long settled as pastoralists in the *mazari'* around Bhamdoun, began to move to the village only towards the turn of the century, so they never became Bhamdounis in the full sense.

With respect to the Greek Orthodox Bhamdouni clans, three further matters deserve brief mention. First, most of these clans included families living in the neighbouring *mazari'*, such as Btallun, al-Rujmah, al-Mantara and 'Ayn al-Jadidah. Second, all but the latest to arrive came to be related to one another in time through intermarriage. Third, each of the larger Bhamdouni clans, including the Maronite Tabets, had its notables at one social extreme, and its commoners at the other. With social class cutting across the clan structure in this manner, no clan in the village could claim superiority over the other.

After the Khairallahs, the largest clan in Bhamdoun were the Mattas. In the late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth, one of the heads of that clan, a *khuri* (priest) called 'Isa, rendered the Shihab emir Bashir II (1788-1840) a great service. The Shihab emirs use to be appointed to the *iltizam* of their mountain territory on an annual basis. Each year, they had to secure a *firman* (decree) of re-appointment from the Ottoman Pasha of Sidon (by 1775, resident in Acre), often against strong competition from one or more Shihabi rivals. And when the competition was between rivals of more or less equal ability, it became a matter of first come to Acre, first served. One year, the competition for the *iltizam* was so fierce that Bashir would not dare go to Acre in person to secure the *firman* for his re-appointment. So Khuri 'Isa, counting on his personal immunity as a priest,

volunteered to go in his place. On his way back, the *Khuri* took the precaution of concealing the *firman* in one his boots. The opponents of Bashir, it was said, actually lay in wait for him near the coastal village of al-Ghaziyyah, south of Sidon; so the *Khuri* had to hide overnight among the reeds of the Zahrani river before he could proceed with the next stage of his return journey. As a reward for his loyalty and valour, Bashir bestowed on Khuri 'Isa the whole of the *mazra'ah* of 'Ayn al-Jadidah as a personal estate, along with the honorific title of sheikh. After the Khuri's death, his descendants became a separate branch of the Matta clan, calling themselves the `Isas, and proudly retaining the sheikhly title. But no matter how hard they tried, they could never persuade their fellow Mattas—let alone the other Bhamdounis—to defer to them as true sheikhs.

Like most people of peasant stock, the Bhamdounis reacted cynically to social pretension. Name-dropping was not one of their habits. But they did speak of the time when their ancestors had the honour of meeting Ibrahim Pasha. This Ibrahim, son of the great Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, had led his father's forces to wrest Syria (including Mount Lebanon) from the Ottomans in 1832, after which he remained in the country until the British, as the allies of the Ottomans, arrived in force to drive him back to Egypt in 1840.

Ibrahim Pasha was travelling from Beirut to Damascus, shortly after his arrival in Syria, when the Bhamdounis went to meet him at Khan Bu-Dikhkhan: the caravan stop along the Beirut-Damascus highway, directly facing their village. The Pasha, according to report, received his humble Bhamdouni visitors with great courtesy, responding politely to their compliments, and listening attentively to their grievances (no matter that he did nothing to redress them). The Bhamdounis thought the man could have easily passed for a *Franji*, or West European, had it not been for his Oriental turban and robes. He had high, ruddy cheeks and blue eyes; and one could tell from his beard that his hair was fair to blond, though slightly greying. 'He was handsome indeed,' the old Bhamdounis of my time would repeat, 'but not as handsome as Sharshar Bayk'. The reference here was to Charles Henry Churchill, a descendant of the Duke of Marlborough in the illegitimate line, who arrived in Mount Lebanon with the British expedition of 1840 and stayed on, marrying a dancing girl from Damascus called Marsheh Sarkis, and settling with her in the *mazra'ah* of Bhawwara.

There he lived in princely style on an annual income of some 500 pounds sterling from consuls, and further earnings from gun-running.

The presence of Charles Churchill in Bhawwara provided the first avenue for social change in the Bhamdoun vicinity. Another Englishman who came to live in Bhawwara, initially as Churchill's guest, was John Lowthian: a retired businessman from Carlisle who chose to spend his declining years as a freelance Presbyterian missionary in Mount Lebanon. Lowthian, assisted by a member of the Salibi clan called Elias Jiryis Shahin, became the founder of the first 'Lebanon Schools', as they were called, one of them in Bhamdoun. This Bhamdoun school—the first the village ever had—was attended more by girls than by boys. It was believed at the time that education could soften a boy and make him unmanly. Consequently, the first literate generation in Bhamdoun numbered more women than men; and until the end of the first world war, most if not all of the teachers in the village were women.

More important figures of the period in the history of Bhamdoun were the American Presbyterian missionary William Benton and his wife Loanza. The Bentons, who first arrived in Ottoman Syria in 1848, made Bhamdoun their home from 1857 until 1869. Under their influence, several Bhamdounis turned Protestant, among them the two richest men in the village, Khaled Tabet and Elias Sabra. The brother of the latter, Jiryis Sabra, was the Greek Orthodox priest of the village.

Before the days of the Bentons, Scottish and American Presbyterian missionaries visiting Bhamdoun had failed to make converts among its inhabitants. So they ended up dismissing the Bhamdounis being hopelessly obdurate. 'Their minds are more barren than the rock on which they live'; so one missionary put it. Popular opinion attributed the obduracy of the Bhamdounis to the fact that they consumed large quantities of grape molasses, which allegedly hardened the brain and set it on one track. Being himself a man with a one-track mind, forever quarrelling with his fellow missionaries in Beirut, William Benton found the Bhamdounis a people after his own heart. It was upon his suggestion that the Protestants among them, in 1863, proceeded to organise themselves as a Presbyterian communion on their own, independently of the American mission in Beirut. Land to build the Protestant church of the village was donated by Elias Sabra, and funds for the construction by Khaled Tabet. To provide beams for the church's wooden ceiling, whole pine trunks had to be

procured from the famed pine forests of Arsun, in the northern Matn, volunteer teams from Bhamdoun—Protestants and others—taking turns at transporting the heavy tree trunks from that distant place. It was said that after the independent Bhamdoun church was established, the Syria mission in Beirut struck the name of Benton off its payroll.

The lore of Bhamdoun was replete with stories about Benton: one of them, about how he allegedly saved their village from massacre in 1860. In that year, two decades of Maronite-Druze quarrels had culminated in a large-scale massacre of Christians in the Druze country. In the Jurd villages, the Christians enjoyed the protection of their benign Abdel-Malik sheikhs, and none of them was in the least hurt. But on one occasion, there was panic in Bhamdoun when Khattar al-`Imad, the Druze sheikh of al-Baruk, arrived nearby with a band of armed followers, apparently intending to attack. It was William Benton, on that occasion, who reportedly saved the day. Accompanied by the village elders, he went out to meet Sheikh Khattar, armed with his Arabic Bible. Pointing to it, and looking the fierce warrior sheikh straight in the eyes, he said, '*Huna yaqul, la taqtul*' (Here it says, thou shall not kill). A variant of the same story is related by Loanza Benton in her unpublished memoirs.

It was following the tragic events of that year that Mount Lebanon, in 1861, was granted the privileged status of a *mutasarrifiyyah*. Thereupon, each village of the Mountain came to have a *shaykh sulh* (elected headman) who kept its official registers, provided it with the services of a notary public, and represented it before the government. In Bhamdoun, this office, by general consent, became the preserve of the family of Badran Zaydan, of the Khairallah clan. These became the Badran sheikhs.

The year the Lebanese *mutasarrifiyyah* was established, a stagecoach service went into operation between Beirut and Damascus, changing horses at Khan Bu-Dikkhan. In that same year also, a French entrepreneur called Fortuné Portalis set up a mechanised silk factory in Btater—the first of its kind in Mount Lebanon. Shortly after, another French silk factory went into operation in the village of Qurayyah, in the southern Matn, just across the Damascus road from the Bhamdoun area. To work their spinneries, both factories began employing women and girls from the Bhamdoun neighbourhood. At the Btater factory, Fortuné Portalis (also known as al-Khawaja Fartuni) paid his workers with hand printed promissory notes which came to be used locally as money.

The boom in the local silk production, starting in the 1860s, provided opportunities for the better-to-do Bhamdounis to grow richer. One such person was Khaled Tabet, formerly a Maronite, and by now a Protestant. To show off his marked increase in wealth, Khaled Tabet built himself a grand house: a two-floor mansion with a marbled hall on the second floor, arches and all, and the first glass façade ever to be seen in the village. The house of Khaled Tabet became the place in Bhamdoun where Ottoman and foreign dignitaries were received whenever they came to visit.

Bhamdoun had been an isolated mountain village before the establishment of the stagecoach service between Beirut and Damascus in 1861. But what really put an end to the isolation of the village was the completion of the cog railway from Beirut to the Syrian interior in the last years of the century. The railway was called the Damas-Hama Prolongement, or D.H.P., and one station for it—the Bhamdoun Station—was constructed at a walking distance of about half an hour from the village.

It was immediately following the completion of the D.H.P. that William II of Germany arrived in Syria in 1898 as a guest of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II. So the German emperor was able to take the train from Beirut for his historical visit to Damascus. Along the way, the Kaiser stopped to rest at Bhamdoun Station, where a delegation from the village went to meet him, in courtesy to him as the guest of their sultan. But Christians from other villages had meanwhile arrived to meet the emperor in the same place for a different purpose. In the presence of the Bhamdounis, and to their extreme embarrassment, they obsequiously asked the Kaiser what he and his great Christian country could do for the Christians of Mount Lebanon. The Kaiser frowned at the question, then proceeded to inquire how many Christians of Mount Lebanon there were. Told that they numbered three hundred thousand, he retorted: 'You live among three hundred million Muslims; so why not turn Muslim?'

Before arriving in Beirut, the Kaiser had visited Jerusalem—a visit which was to earn him the Arabic nickname of Hajj Ghilyum, or 'Pilgrim William'. '*Hajji Guilyum est un salaud*': so sang the North African troops of the French army during the first world war. In Jerusalem, the Kaiser and his wife Augusta Victoria laid the cornerstones for a Lutheran church, and also for a hospital bearing the Kaiserin's name, to be placed in the care of the Diakonissen of Kaiserwerth. Much earlier, in 1861, a Lutheran

missionary had established a German school for girls in the Holy City—originally an orphanage called the Preussische Waisenhaus, run by the same Diakonissen. And some girls from Bhamdoun were boarding students in that school at the time of the Kaiser's visit. One of them, Nastas Haddad, returned to Bhamdoun after her graduation calling herself Schwester Nastas, and wearing the vestments and bonnet of a Lutheran Diakonisse.

Schwester Nastas was a business-minded woman with a good eye for opportunity. With the improving relations between the Ottoman State and Germany, many Germans were coming to Ottoman Syria, some on military missions, some as technical advisers, and others on business, or to do Oriental research and perhaps spy on the side. So, with some help from the Diakonissen of Jerusalem, Schwester Nastas set up a hostel in Bhamdoun for German summer guests. She called it Pension Schwester Nastas. During the first world war, the commander of the German forces in Syria, Liman von Sanders, used this pension for his summer headquarters, as did Jamal Pasha, who was then the Ottoman military governor of Syria. At the same time, the house of Jiryis Waked, near the pension, was sequestered by the Ottoman and German authorities and turned into a military *naqahatkhane* (convalescence home).

In the course of the war, the Maronite patriarch Elias al-Huwayyik was prevailed upon to accept a *firman* from the Ottoman sultan Muhammad Rashad confirming him in his Christian ecclesiastical office. And the *firman* was to be delivered to the patriarch by Jamal Pasha, who was then in Bhamdoun. Politically backed by France, the Maronite patriarchs had earlier refused to receive such Ottoman *firmans*, which implied an acceptance on their part of Ottoman—and hence Muslim—tutelage. Now, Patriarch Huwayyik, temporarily bereft of French support, had not only to accept the *firman*, but to undergo the further humiliation of coming to Bhamdoun in person to receive it. The ceremony for the purpose was held in the marbled hall of Elias Tabet, Khaled's son. And to entertain the Ottoman Pasha and the Maronite prelate, the Protestant church choir, organised and conducted by my maternal grandmother, came forth with particularly spirited rendering of two Ottoman anthems, first *Padishahim chok yasha* (in Turkish), then *Rejouis toi Turquie aimée* (in French). The composer of the music for the second anthem was Wadi' Sabra: a

Bhamdoun Protestant from 'Ayn al-Jadidah who had studied music at the Paris conservatoire with the famous Theodore Dubois.

The older Bhamdounis of my time spoke warmly of the Ottomans and did not recall their rule in our country as having been particularly foreign, let alone oppressive. What was foreign to them, and much abhorred, was the French mandate that replaced Ottoman rule in the wake of the Great War: not only the mandate itself, but all the Lebanese political trappings it brought with it. Among Bhamdouni women, the year 1918-1919 was remembered as *Sint al-Ihtilal* (the year of the foreign occupation). The proclamation of the State of Greater Lebanon that followed in 1920, perceived as being essentially a French boon to the Maronites, got a chilly reception in the village from all but the Maronites. And no less chilly was the reception accorded by the Bhamdounis to the proclamation of the Lebanese Republic six years later. What were also initially perceived as French gimmicks, unworthy of much attention, were the Lebanese flag, originally the French tricolour with the cedar tree on the central white, and the Lebanese national anthem, although the composer of the music for this anthem was none other than the Bhamdouni Wadi' Sabra. Officials from the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts had to be purposely sent from Beirut to impose the teaching of the new anthem at the Bhamdoun Protestant school, where it was most resisted. I was in first grade at the time, and retain a vivid memory of the event.

Let me stop here to describe to you the Bhamdoun of those days. The village consisted of two distinct parts divided by the main street, which was the *suq*. Above the *suq* was the newer Bhamdoun, where many of the inhabitants were newcomers such as ourselves, not having much to do with the intimate life of the village. The Protestant church and Pension Schwester Nastas were located in that area. So was the Benton school: the Protestant elementary school for boys and girls carrying the name of William Benton and subsidised from the United States by his daughters Mary and Hatty, both whom were born in Bhamdoun. Below the *suq* lay the two older quarters of the village: the *Ka'b al-Day'ah* (village bottom). The eastern quarter was the Maronite one, centring around the Maronite church; while the western quarter was the Greek Orthodox one, centring around the Greek Orthodox church. Attached to the latter church was the Greek Orthodox school attended only by boys. It was only in the 1940s that the Maronites of the village began to have a school of their own.

Until the late 1930s, Bhamdoun had no electricity and no running water. The newer houses, such as ours, had cisterns which stored water from the winter rains, or to which water was drawn from some spring. Most families, however, depended for their water on the *'ayn* (the large water cistern whose location marked the centre of the *suq*). The women of the village spent much of the day going back and forth to the *'ayn* to draw water, which they carried back home in earthen jars deftly balanced on their heads.

All homes used kerosene lamps for lighting. Before the introduction of kerosene, home lighting used to depend on the *siraj (*olive oil lamp), supplemented by what were called *liqsh* (resinous strips of pinewood which, if planted perpendicularly, burnt slowly from the top down, like candles, and could also be used as torchlights). In all homes, iron stoves burning wood and *kanafish* (pine cones) were used for heating. For cooking, a special *tabbakh* (cooker) was used, home-made from clay mixed with *fishkah* (donkey dung). The *tabbakh* burnt charcoal. When the vineyards were pruned in the late autumn and early winter, the prunings were carefully gathered and dried, to turn into what was called *jarazun.* Because it could be quickly kindled, and as quickly extinguished, *jarazun,* was used for baking bread: the circular, paper-thin loaves of the mountain bread, about two feet in diameter, baked on the convex pan called the *saj.*

All provisions for the winter had to be prepared before its onset. By late September, every home would have prepared its own raisins, grape molasses, dried figs, walnuts, jams, syrups, olives and olive oil; also its own string sausages and *qawrama* (meat preserved in its own fat), from the lambs which the women had spent the whole summer fattening on mulberry leaves stuffed with cereals. Another basic winter provision to be home prepared was *kishk* (thickened and salted yoghurt fortified with crushed wheat, then sun-dried and ground to a fine powder from which a thick soup was made and eaten with bread forming an essential part of the winter diet).

While the last home preparations for the winter were being made, camel and mule caravans would begin arriving from the Biqa' and Hawran to an open place near the *suq*, bringing wheat, lentils, potatoes, and other staples. From the Hama region, in northern Syria, came the bedouin traders who supplied the village with *samneh* (butter ghee). Other visitors of the season were the knife grinders; the tinsmiths; the copperware platers; the

itinerant cobblers; also the Maghrebine doctors: dark, sinister-looking and deep-voiced figures in Algerine garb, riding their mules and hawking their purgatives, elixirs and ointments with cries of '*tabib, tabib; dawa, dawa*' ('doctor, doctor; medicine, medicine'). They probably came from Damascus, where a colony of Algerine exiles had been established since 1848.

From the autumn to the late spring, vegetables in Bhamdoun, as elsewhere, became totally unavailable and nothing green was eaten. Starting in the late winter, however, the field thorns and weeds would begin to sprout, and women and children would take knives and go out to gather the sprouts. They made good salads, but they were called *saliqah* (things for boiling) because they could also be cooked. After a night of rain, people would also go out in the morning to forage for snails. Fresh meat from the village butcher (veal or lamb, but never pork) was only occasionally available during the winter, and few could afford it. Chicken were raised for their eggs and, except for male spring chicks, only eaten as boilers after they had stopped laying.

By my time, the women of Bhamdoun, and also the younger men, already wore European dress. But the older women always kept their heads covered with scarves of fine cloth or lace. The poorer ones had their scarves fringed with beads, or with the tiny seashells called *oya*; the richer had theirs fringed with small gold coins of the Ottoman period, called *baraghit*. As for the men, most of the older ones still wore traditional vestments (mostly, the enormous baggy trousers called the *shirwal* and its accessories). For headgear, the relatively well-to-do wore the red *tarboosh*, or fez, while the poor wore the long felt cap called the *labbadah*. Men who wore the *labbadah* did not use boots of modern type, but the more primitive and cheaper *madas*: a cross between boots and clogs, made of cowhide.

For additional winter clothing, women spun their own undyed woollen yarn with hand spindles, then proceeded to make a coarse knitwear from the thread which certainly kept you warm, but which also made you feel extremely uncomfortable from the continuous itching.

As a rule, the traditional Bhamdouni home was spotlessly clean, but the living area in it was small, often limited to one room for the whole family, with an adjoining *sutayhah* (porch) which could only be used in the summer, and a *qabu* (vaulted basement) for winter storage. The *sutayhah*

of the house was normally lined with pots growing fragrant herbs, such as basil, or perhaps flowers—usually snapdragons, wallflowers or carnations. As for the living room of the house, it served all purposes, its furniture consisting of mattresses on which the family sat and also slept. Ordinarily, this room had a square central pillar from which curtains could be drawn to the walls to create compartments and secure privacy. Along the walls, as on the four sides of the pillar, recesses called *kuwarat* (singular *kuwarah*) were used for storage. The largest such recess -called the *yuk*—was used as a linen cupboard, and also to store extra mattresses and quilts. The floor of the house was normally covered with straw mats, one or two sheepskins, perhaps a pileless rug of Hawran or Hama make, or perhaps a *bilas* (the black tent-weave of goat-hair which one could buy from the Kanisah bedouins). House ceilings were made of wood, and the flat roofs of earth. All such roofs had to be regularly rolled in winter, and also shovelled of snow, to prevent water leakage. With the coming of spring, these roofs sprouted with grass and daisies, turning green, then bright yellow and white. The lavatories were invariably outside latrines, with no water or drains. When summer guests arrived from Beirut to rent a house for the season, the family moved either to the *qabu* of the house, or else pitched for itself a tent or a hut made of tree branches on the roof.

Commonly, the Bhamdouni house formed part of a range of houses called a *hara*, which shared a common roof and one or two common latrines. And the larger the extended family, the longer was its *hara*. Originally, these *haras* had been constructed gradually, to accommodate the growth of the extended family. I do not personally recall new units being added to them. When a young man of the family married, and there was no vacant house in the *hara* to accommodate him and his bride, they had to move outside, or else stay with the man's parents, a compartment of the family living room being curtained off to give the young couple some privacy.

Despite the fact that Bhamdoun had long been connected to Beirut by railway, and more recently by motorcar, the village, in 1939, still led a somewhat isolated existence. There was little gossip in the village, the Bhamdounis being a taciturn and discreet people who did not interfere in one another's affairs. Families regularly exchanged visits or spent the evenings together; and women exchanged visits in the afternoons, sometimes to eat *tabbulah* when parsley and mint were in season. I

remember *tabbulah*—certainly in Bhamdoun—as being a woman's visiting dish, rarely eaten by men.

Good breeding demanded that formalities never be dropped among adults, no matter how familiar the relations between them. The first name was hardly ever used in address. It was normally replaced by the patronym *Bu* so-and-so for the men, and the matronym *Umm* so-and-so for the women. Or else, the first name in address was preceded by the title *Khawaja* (gentleman) for a man, and *Sitt* (lady) for a woman. Social conversation, for the most part, was stereotyped, much of it consisting of an exchange of stock greetings, compliments, aphorisms, proverbs and platitudes. For every stock address, there was a stock response—*li-kulli khitabin jawab*, as the young used to be taught. Failure to come out with the one and only appropriate response to a given address could be interpreted as a slight, and the young had to learn from their elders how to proceed correctly with a conversation, so as not to give offence or be branded as *ma bya'rif yihki ma' al-nas* (inarticulate). Humour rarely went beyond the occasional sly dig. To speak one's mind in disagreement was considered unmannerly, unless one's independent opinion had been plainly solicited. It used to be said that the conservative, taciturn character of the Bhamdounis derived from the fact that they had been neighbours of the Druzes for so long, which made them Druze Christians rather than regular ones. Like the Druzes, the Bhamdounis fully articulated the guttural *qaf* in their speech, which many other Christians did not.

Also like their Druze neighbours, the Bhamdounis had the reputation of being a thrifty, sober people who avoided all show of frivolity. This naturally made their social life somewhat dull. I do not recall singing and dancing in the village except at weddings. And even on such occasions, levity was normally exercised with restraint. Most Bhamdounis drank arak or sweet wine at lunch on Sundays and feast days, in the privacy of their homes, and never beyond the limits of moderation. The three habitual drunks in the village, in my time, were treated as outcasts. The Bhamdoun ethic maintained that intemperance in drinking, as in singing, dancing, joking or loud laughter, detracted from a person's *waqar* (gravity). Practical jokes were strongly disapproved of, because they could lead to enmity. '*Al-mazh bi-qallil al-haybah wu-biwallid al-niqar*', 'Jokes reduce dignity and breed quarrels', it used to be said.

Bhamdoun's was also an extremely honest society. Until the end of the second world war, theft and robbery in the village were unknown. People left their homes sometimes for the whole day with the keys in the doors. They were enormous keys, which made them a bother to carry, especially as people normally had to walk from place to place, sometimes over long distances, to visit relatives in one *mazra'ah* or another.

Relations between Bhamdoun and its Druze neighbourhood were friendly, and often cordial. On one occasion, in 1925, a young man from Bhamdoun shot two Druzes from Shanay dead; and it was feared at the moment that a feud between the two villages would follow. But wiser counsels on both sides prevented the development of such a feud. So, within a matter of months, Druzes from Shanay resumed their visits to the *suq* of Bhamdoun—the women on foot, the men on their donkeys—to sell their produce of eggs and vegetables. Later, when running water was brought to Bhamdoun, it came from the spring of `Ayn al-Baradi`ah, between the Druze villages of Sofar and Majd al-Ba`na; and two Druzes from Sofar—*Bu Qasim* and *Bu Sami*—became shareholders in the Bhamdoun water company, and regular visitors to the village. In 1938, when the last Shaykh Sulh of Bhamdoun—Sheikh As`ad Badran—died, Druzes came from all over the Jurd to mourn him, the delegation from each village chanting its dirge in turn, as it arrived. The Druze mourners were solemnly led by their religious sheikhs, the *'uqqal*, wearing their traditional hand-woven garbs of black striped with red, and shielding themselves from the sun with their white parasols: a picture from an old Lebanon that has long passed from existence.

At the outbreak of the second world war in 1939, the municipal records of Bhamdoun indicated a total population of 1,750, most of them year-round residents. By that time electricity had been introduced to the village and the owner of the electricity company also owned a radio. Another—and the first I ever saw—was introduced to the village by a rich Palestinian called Mikhayil Shamsi, who came to live in Pension Schwester Nastas. It was installed in the parlour of the pension, for everyone to see and inspect. Yet another radio—this one with an electric gramophone—was installed in the hall of Hotel Belle Vue: a new establishment catering to a clientele more alien to the Bhamdounis than the French: the seemingly carefree Levantines who arrived from Beirut in the summers in sports cars, dressed in the latest Parisian fashions, speaking pseudo-Parisian French, playing

tennis in the afternoons, and dancing the tango and rhumba late into the night to the tunes of O Donna Clara, O Mexicana, and Guitarra Romana. They pretended not to speak or understand Arabic. What was the world coming to?

When I left Bhamdoun in 1941 to go to boarding school, then to college, I was too young to realise that the world I was leaving represented the vanishing village culture of the Lebanon mountains. By the 1930s, the traditional resources of Bhamdoun had already become insufficient for its inhabitants. What the village had come to need was more than vineyards and a few hundred summer guests to keep it going. But sentimental attachments to the old ways, coupled with lack of alternatives, kept the village culture alive for a while. Then things began to happen which forced the village to begin changing its ways. The second world war brought with it inflation and shortages. This made it necessary for many of the younger Bhamdounis to abandon their vineyards and seek more profitable employment outside the village, mainly in Beirut. At the same time, the vineyards of Bhamdoun, already hit by phyloxera, began to die, along with the older generation of Bhamdounis that used to tend them. With the advent of the Arab oil boom after the war, rich Gulf Arabs developed a special liking for Bhamdoun as a summer resort, so they started buying the agricultural land of the village for their summer houses. For the Bhamdounis, it became far more profitable to sell their dead vineyards as real estate, than to attempt their agricultural resuscitation. By the 1950s, practically every other person in Bhamdoun had become a full-time or part-time real estate agent. And between land sales, commissions and involvement in construction and other services, many Bhamdounis grew rich. They began to send their children to school and college in Beirut; also to run businesses in Beirut, and to have homes in Beirut. The traditional culture which had kept them poor in their ancestral village for so long vanished rapidly by itself, as Bhamdoun was transformed into a flourishing summer resort and dormitory town for Beirut, all but completely empty in the winter off-season. Thus, Bhamdoun died a natural death as a village long before it was physically destroyed in the course of the Lebanese civil war.

The circumstances which led to the destruction of Bhamdoun in the late summer of 1983 are unrelated to the parochial history of the village.

They relate, rather, to the complex circumstances of the civil war which raged in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990.

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